

Safeguarding America's Bounty

In today's global marketplace, the borders between countries are beginning to disappear. International travel and trade take place in larger numbers and with fewer restrictions than ever before, bringing an average of 435,000 people into the United States each day. However, this huge volume of people and products often unknowingly brings with it real threats to American agricultural and natural resources. These threats include foreign pests and diseases that could devastate this country's largest industry.

Protecting America's vast agricultural and natural resources from attack by invasive pests and diseases is the job of the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's (APHIS) Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ) program.

PPQ inspectors work across the country at 144 ports of entry to screen all passenger baggage, mail, ship and airline stores and food supplies, vehicles, and cargo for prohibited agricultural products and associated materials that may harbor exotic pests or diseases. These pests and diseases could threaten the abundance and variety of the U.S. food supply, damage our natural resources, and cost American taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars for higher priced food and fiber products and the cost of control and eradication programs. In some areas, such as Hawaii, PPQ conducts preclearance inspections before travelers leave the island to ensure a faster entry into the mainland of the United States.

In fiscal year (FY) 2001, more than 3,000 PPQ inspectors, with help from the dogs of USDA's Detector Dog program, which sniff luggage, mail, automobiles, and cargo for hidden fruits and vegetables, cleared approximately a quarter of a billion travelers and millions of pieces of luggage for entry into the United States. Over 540,000 aircraft that brought passengers and cargo to this country also underwent PPQ inspections.

Travelers entering the United States are just one way foreign pests and diseases make their way into this country. Cargo and packages mailed from foreign countries are also pathways for prohibited agricultural items. In FY 2001, PPQ conducted more than 2 million inspections of commercial cargo shipments, more than 450,000 inspections of railcars, and more than 430,000 inspections of mail parcels.

From these inspections, PPQ intercepted over 1.7 million illegal agricultural products, which represented over 70,000 foreign pests and potential plant and animal diseases dangerous to American agriculture.

All prohibited items seized during inspections are examined, rendered harmless, and destroyed using appropriate measures. Large cargo shipments of agricultural goods found to be ineligible for entry may be subject to treatment, re-exported, or destroyed.

In recent years, the number of illegal agricultural products smuggled into the United States has increased. In response to this increase, PPQ created the Smuggling Interdiction and Trade Compliance (SITC) program. Along with several Federal, State, and private organizations, SITC officers ensure compliance with U.S. agricultural import laws. They work with PPQ inspectors around the country at ports of entry to discover and close the pathways through which prohibited commodities enter the United States.

Traveling to the United States

Travelers are often surprised when told that their "one little piece of fruit or meat" can cause serious agricultural damage. In fact, one piece of fruit or meat may contain many microscopic pests, and one carelessly discarded item can devastate American agriculture. For example, it's quite likely that a traveler carried in the wormy fruit that brought Mediterranean fruit flies to California in 1979. The 3-year fight to eradicate this pest cost more than \$100 million.

Fruits, Vegetables, and Plants—Travelers may bring in some fruits, vegetables, and plants without advance permission, provided they are declared, inspected, and found free of pests and diseases. However, a permit is needed in advance to bring in certain plants and plant parts intended for growing.

Meat and Animal Products—Regulations prohibit travelers from bringing into the United States fresh, dried, and canned meats and meat products from most foreign countries. Viruses, such as those that cause foot-and-mouth disease and classical swine fever, can survive for long periods of time in sausage and other types of meat, including many types of canned meat from foreign countries. Commercially canned meat is allowed if it has been processed according to very strict guidelines.

Soil, Sand, Minerals, and Shells—Since soil-borne organisms threaten both plants and animals, soil, earth, and sand will be denied entry to the United States. PPQ agriculture inspectors may have to disinfect the clothes and shoes of any traveler who visited a farm or ranch overseas.

PPQ officers also inspect and supervise the cleaning of all military equipment and troop supplies when the U.S. military personnel return from missions outside the country.

Live Animals and Birds—Fruits, vegetables, and meats aren't the only products that carry harmful pests and diseases into this country. Live animals and birds can harbor diseases such as exotic Newcastle disease, which is highly contagious.

Live animals and birds can enter the United States if they have the proper certification, permits, inspections, and meet the quarantine rules that vary with the animal and its origin. Certain animals brought from some countries pose different risks, such as dogs from Central and South America, which can be infested with screwworm.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) regulates the importation of certain animal species and has specific regulations regarding pets (including cats and dogs) and nonhuman primates. CDC requires that pet dogs and cats appear healthy upon visual inspection at the port of entry. Cats may be imported without further restriction. Dogs coming from a country not free of rabies must be accompanied by proof that their rabies vaccination is current and was administered at least

30 days before arrival in the United States. Young puppies may be imported without proof of rabies vaccination; however, they must be confined at a place of the owner's choosing until they are 3 months old and then vaccinated. Confinement must then continue for 30 days. Monkeys and other nonhuman primates may not be imported as pets under any circumstances.

Pet birds purchased abroad for personal use can enter the United States. They are also subject to restrictions by some State departments of agriculture, and they must be quarantined by the USDA for 30 days. Quarantine arrangements must be made well in advance because facilities are limited and available only at certain ports.

As today's global marketplace continues to open borders between countries, the opportunities for worldwide travel and trade are on the rise. With this increase comes the threat of foreign invasive pests and diseases entering the United States and damaging our agricultural industry and natural resources. The more than 3,000 APHIS inspectors stationed at 144 ports of entry make up the first line of defense for this country's agriculture. Through the rigorous inspection process, APHIS helps to safeguard American agriculture, including the 1.9 million farms in the United States and the food budget and nutritional choices of every American consumer.

For more information on APHIS' safeguarding efforts, as well as additional APHIS programs, visit the APHIS Web site at www.aphis.usda.gov.

Inspections and Interceptions in FY 2001	
Inspections	
Aircraft/Ships	593,125
Bus/Vehicle Passengers	7,749,909
Cargo	2,181,904
Mail/Packages	434,216
Air/Sea Passengers/Crew	85,016,354
Pedestrians	8,747,529
Railcars	454,579
Total number of inspections	97,490,896
Interceptions of illegal agricultural products	
Animal Byproducts	14,437
Meat/Poultry Products	298,794
Plant Materials	1,414,781
Total number of interceptions	1,728,012
Total number of invasive pests found	70,850

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